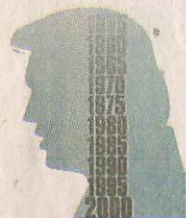


After 54 years, illustrated songbook keeps holding children's attention

4-25-01

By Susan Whitney
Deseret News staff writer



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Many years ago, a friend asked Erla Young to illustrate a songbook for youngsters. That's how Young began to draw children. She drew pug-nosed, wide-eyed, apple-cheeked children. She drew children on skates, children on ponies, children climbing trees, children saying their prayers. She drew children celebrating every holiday known to America in those years, the mid-1940s.

And into every illustration, Young painted optimism. There is not a tear to be found in the entire 60 pages of "My Picture Book of Songs." There is, in fact, only one frowny face, and this on the mug of Simple Sal who *does not like to eat her vegetables*. (In order to emphasize the incorrectness of Sal's choice, the pianist is instructed to play Sal's song "slowly and scornfully.")

Young's illustrations are innocence incarnate, as are the melodies and words to the

songs. This, in spite of the fact that the three Salt Lake women who produced "My Picture Book of Songs" began the project before World War II ended, before the bomb dropped, at a time when a lot of little Utahns had daddies overseas, at a time when a lot of little Utahns were very worried indeed.

It was Alene Dalton who came up with the idea for the songbook. Dalton owned a nursery school and had a bachelor's degree from the University of Utah in child psychology, and she thought the children needed cheering up.

So Dalton wrote some spritely rhymes and invited her friend, Myriel Ashton, to compose some spritely melodies. (Ashton was a pianist who had studied at the McCune School of Music.) Dalton asked Young to illustrate.

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Erla Young illustrated a children's songbook in 1947.

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YOUNG

Continued from C1

Young, who had studied at the Crichton Art School in Washington, D.C., was, at the time, a young mother. Her husband, Brigham, was in Germany under the command of Gen. George S. Patton. Ashton's husband was in the South Pacific. She, too, was a young mother. Both Ashton and Young spent a lot of time listening to the radio newscasts. Both were glad to have a project to work on, glad for something to take their minds off the war.

By the time they finished the book, the war was winding down. There was still a paper shortage; publishers were slow to buy. But the three friends were not to be put off. They believed their book was vital to the schoolrooms of America.

The Daltons were able to obtain gas stamps in order to drive to the Mayo Clinic. Ashton and Young eagerly joined them, and once in Chicago, they visited the publishers personally.

The president of the M.A. Donahue Co. agreed to print the book if they could get orders for 5,000 copies. A snap, they said.

Then, Ashton and Dalton put together a musical production

with little Susie Young and little Janiel Ashton singing songs from the book. They traveled the state, signing up buyers.

As for Young, she says she was too shy to perform. But the orders came in, and the book was printed, finally, in 1947.

Dalton went on to become "The Story Book Princess," in the new medium of television. Ashton also got a job on TV, as a musical homemaker. "She'd sing a song and then she'd cook something," recalls Young.

Meanwhile, Young became a fashion illustrator, drawing newspaper ads for Auerbachs and ZCMI. She wrote a parenting column for the *Deseret News*. She drew paper dolls for *The Children's Friend* magazine. Through the years, "My Picture Book of Song" continued to sell, as did a book Young had written alone — "Betsy Buttons," the story of a doll that came across the plains in 1847, property of a little pioneer named Eliza Jane.

In 1985, after being published by a variety of houses, "My Picture Book of Song" went out of print. As the book's 50th anniversary approached, Young found herself thinking more and more about Ashton and Dalton, both of whom had passed away. She decided, "I can't let this anniversary go by."

She arranged for The Color Litho Lab to reprint the book.

She didn't have any idea how to distribute it, she says. She ended up going to Provo for the city's Fourth of July celebration. There, she rented a booth. Her books were literally snatched from the table.

It seems there are a lot of grandparents who longed to pass on "My Picture Book of Songs" to the next wide-eyed generation. Sales have been steady since 1997, Young says. "I just reprinted another 5,000 copies."

She sounds a bit surprised that modern children are not bored by the book. "So many of the little songs are just about everyday experiences."

Perhaps the book's popularity can be explained by that very fact. It just may be as reassuring as the authors wanted it to be. And perhaps it is not only the everyday subject matter, but also the chronology that is appealing. The songs follow the seasons of the year. They echo the happy rhythm of childhood.

The songbook makes a hopeful promise, that summer will come again, and so will Thanksgiving, and every fall there will be red leaves, and every spring there will be kites.

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14	Movie: ★★ "Guilty as Sin" (1993, Suspense) Rebecca De Mornay, Don Johnson. 37775				Star Trek: Voyager ∩ 'TV-PG' (CC) 71959		Friends 'TV-PG' 80510		(:40) Frasier ∩ 5206161 Newsradio ∩ 8755355		
16	It's a Miracle (N) ∩ 'TV-PG' (CC) 93171		Candid Camera's Battle of the Sexes (CC) 79591		Diagnosis Murder ∩ 'TV-PG' (CC) 99355		It's a Miracle 82978		Hollywood 91626 Paid Prog. 85361539		
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DSN	Smart Guy (CC) 382862	BoyWorld 575419	Movie: "Stepsister From Planet Weird" (2000) Courtnee Draper. TV-G' 240607			Movie: "Motocrossed" (2001, Adventure) Alana Austin, Mary-Margaret Humes. (CC) 3167539					
ENC	(6:10) Movie: ★★★ "Ghostbusters" 48343978		Movie: ★★★ "The Jewel of the Nile" (1985) Kathleen Turner, Michael Douglas. ∩ (CC) 3590978				Movie: ★★★ "When a Man Loves a Woman" (1994) Andy Garcia. 66457187				
HBO	"Home Aln" 2951423	(:45) Movie: ★★ "Three to Tango" (1999, Comedy) Matthew Perry, Neve Campbell. ∩ (CC) 71161404			Moulin 110404		Movie: ★★★ "The Whole Nine Yards" (2000) Bruce Willis. ∩ 501607				
MAX	Movie: ★★★ "The Omen" (1976, Horror) Gregory Peck, Lee Remick. ∩ (CC) 825959				Movie: ★★★ "Damien: Omen II" (1978, Horror) William Holden, Lee Grant. (CC) 564201				"Final Con." 4243930		
SHO	(6:35) Movie: ★★★ "Quiz Show" (1994, Drama) John Turturro, Rob Morrow. ∩ (CC) 51825978			Movie: ★★ "3 Strikes" (2000) Brian Hooks, N'Bushe Wright. ∩ (CC) 788794			Extras: Spider		"Scream 3" ∩ 615442		
STZ	(6:40) Movie: ★★ "Dudley Do-Right" 53619065		Movie: ★★★ "Shanghai Noon" (2000, Comedy) Jackie Chan, Owen Wilson. ∩ (CC) 5681152			Movie: ★★ "Supercop 2" (1993) Michelle Yeoh. (Dubbed) ∩ (CC) 7193268					
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A&E	Movie: ★★★ "Awakenings" (1990, Drama) Robin Williams, Robert De Niro. 288751				Newsradio (CC) 754862		Biography "Julia Child: An Appetite for Life" 868404		"Awaken" 725794		
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